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Appealing to Romanian Consumers During Christmas Campaigns by Means of Religious and Traditional Aspects

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Abstract

The relevance of local blueprints explains very well the consumer's needs and the way s/he is represented in Christmas campaigns. Global and local brands adopt the same strategy to attain consumer insight and secure loyalty. The purpose of the paper is to present consumer views on winter campaigns, considering that Romania is a traditional society, based on a solid religious background. Specific market characteristics, Christmas symbols and the relationship between global and local (glocalization) have become relevant means to appeal to Romanians who are equally fascinated by Santa Claus and local traditions.

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1. Introduction

Appealing to consumers during Christmas campaigns involves higher awareness of their religious and cultural backgrounds. Besides, glocalization (defined as the relation between global and local) has a huge impact on their attitude, given the confusions between religion, customs and tradition. The entire communication process depends on what Albertson (2011) called implicit and explicit attitudes towards different subjects. Later, researchers (Maison Greenwald, & Bruin, 2004; Brunel, Tietje, & Greenwald, 2004) argued that both attitudes affect consumer choice given the brand associations promoted by communication campaigns.

Another important aspect that cannot be neglected is the direct connection between religious behaviour and identity, which implies cultural, social, and even political issues. Iannaccone (1992) has explained economic decisions based on religious behaviour, considering that collective activity can lead to free-rider problems. Each

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religion establishes consumption norms and markets adapt to them in order to better appeal to consumers. A few are more radical and heterogeneous (i.e. the Buddhist and the Muslim religions), while the Christian Churches may be similarly approached. According to Coşgel and Minkler, “Consumption norms provide not just the required language but also the rules that regulate communication.” (2004, p.341). Advertising campaigns definitely rely on these consumption norms, which describe the way local consumers should be appealed. Standardized campaigns do not emphasize the traditional local background, considering only global features of the celebrations, such as Christmas. However, adaptation and localization respect consumer insight to lift brand credibility. According to Grinde (1998) religion and spirituality are *sine qua non* condition of daily life, regardless of other aspects such as income, demographic segmentation or relationships. Communication campaigns cannot neglect this side of humanity that justifies a type of consumption. At Christmas time, people express what they feel and think by consuming more, and advertisers look for the best solution to create compelling advertising. This means addressing many customers, both conservative and nonconformist, by using traditional and ritual stories which are easily understood. In fact two research directions are related to religious attitudes and consumption: the first one argued that less religious consumers prefer new products (Esso & Dibb, 2004), whereas the second one highlighted those more religious consumers not attracted by changes and challenges (McDaniel & Burnett, 1990). Therefore, analyzing Romanian consumers (considering religious people) involves answering an interesting question: what is the best way to raise campaign efficiency, tradition or global strategy?

2. Methodology

Relying on consumer experience on the market, the research method consists of a survey (a 700 questionnaire sample) performed face-to-face between December 2011 and January 2012. This was organized on different research levels, but we are interested only in open-ended questions studied by means of content analysis. The survey investigates the following issues: the original status of the Romanian market, Christmas symbols, the main characters in Romanian Christmas ads, religious features, the relationship between global and local, and the hierarchy of traditional winter campaigns. Respondents were selected according to several criteria: their knowledge of advertising (future professionals), their interest in this area, and their communication skills.

The survey differentiated between opinion and simple questions. In the first case we deal with suggestions and recommendations for the industry, while in the second one respondents are just advertisement viewers, most of which students ages 23-28, people very well linked to the market and media flow. The questionnaire was made of two parts: the first one focused on 16 close-ended questions, and the second included 10 open-ended questions, providing additional useful information. In order to obtain a relevant output, we first used a quantitative approach and then interpreted the results by comparing the results. Besides, we decided to organize the questions in four categories as follows: 1. time of delivering traditional campaigns 2. Romanian market specificity; 3 Christmas ads; 4. Christmas heroes.

2.1 Research findings

2.1.1 Broadcasting traditional commercials

Asking respondents questions regarding the best time to broadcast traditional commercials and brands developing this kind of campaigns, our purpose was to analyze the viewer's receptiveness. Considering they have communication and advertising knowledge, we expected homogeneous answers that could have simplified this approach. On the contrary, we registered a broad approach caused by audience interests, age and maybe market exploration. Therefore, we had to find a way to concentrate opinions and organize them in a statistical manner.

The results point out the relevance of Orthodox religious celebrations (140 votes), when advertising introduces new campaigns which persuasively appeal to Romanian consumers. Answers differ so much because many respondents believed both celebrations are equally important, while some of them chose either Christmas or Easter. Moreover, 120 of 700 surveys preferred to be more specific, adding months to their answers as well, i.e. “December-Christmas, April/May-Easter,” while 42 mentioned only seasons, i.e. “winter”. However, almost everybody noticed that advertising generally pays attention to the religious celebrations and advertisements delivered during this time.

Following the same idea, the questionnaire investigates the way brands promoting traditional messages are treasured by viewers. Consequently, respondents were asked to find a minimum of two brands that broadcast winter

and Christmas TV ads between December 2010 and January 2011. 336 of 700 questioned people did not find an answer, 60 found only one brand, and 10 identified one brand and a product. For this reason, in practice we analyzed 308 valid surveys, which fulfilled all requirements. Coca-Cola tops all 40 brands that respondents included in their surveys with 136 citations, and the next two brands (Vodafone-mobile phone and Boromir-bakery) are placed quite far from this result, each of them summing 50 votes. Cosmote (mobile-phone) indicates the third level of this hierarchy (48), while Tuborg occupies the next level with 40 votes. Jacobs coffee is the last brand included in this notoriety hierarchy with 26 choices, because all other brands have less than 20 votes. Conclusions here regard two dimensions: the relationship between local and global aspects on the Romanian market according to respondent opinions, and the variety of product categories conveying Christmas messages. First, global brands drew respondents' attention more easily than local brands, considering that only 7 Romanian brands became part of the notoriety hierarchy, (Boromir, Begenbier, Covalact, Napolact, Dobrogea, Vel Pitar, Titan). In terms of brand category, communication brands (in this case, mobile phones) are dominant, and then drinks (beer and juices), bakery and coffee. We can say that they are not directly connected with Christmas, except for traditional bakery in Romania (Christmas cake) and, obviously, Coca-Cola, whose campaigns remind the consumer of its history and uniqueness.

2.1. 2. Romanian market specificity

First, respondents were asked about a specific (better said a traditional) aspect often met in domestic advertising; second, they were asked which local element is often developed in Christmas and winter campaigns. For the first, we organized answers directly related to the research purpose, giving up some that lead to confusion or multiple interpretations. For this reason, 98 surveys cannot be used, and 52 were invalidated because the respondents missed the point. Therefore, only 550 of 700 respondents offered us substantial material for this paper. 100 wrote they had no clue about this topic. The Romanian village topped their preferences, in terms of landscape, architectures and agriculture (114 replies). Tradition directly regards this issue, which includes rituals, lifestyles, folklore, music, specific clothes. Traditional gastronomy drew respondents' attention as well, according to the number of answers (84). What else could be included in this hierarchy? Definitely humour understood as irony, sarcasm and parody, represented an option for 70 respondents. Family and stereotypes appear only in 54 cases and Romanian nature in 30, because respondents certainly considered the variety of landscape. The last aspect brings forward history and culture, but, unfortunately, did not receive more than 8 votes, which might be justified given that most respondents are young, unaware of their past, being they were brought up in democratic times. On the other hand, we are faced with a contradiction: although respondents are young, they chose the Romanian village as being best represented in ads. This means advertisements have a great impact on viewers regardless of their age.

The next question is more specific and it highlights local aspects in Christmas and winter ads. There is a difference between Christmas and winter campaigns as far as other religious events (for example, St. Nicholas St. John, the 40- day Christmas fast) are celebrated before, as well as after Santa's arrival. 80 questionnaires of the entire corpus were not included in the research for the same reasons as earlier, either the answers were incomplete and confusing, or they lead us to many perspectives, a fact that could compromise research objectivity. Therefore, we rely on 520 surveys of 700 to get quantitative and qualitative output. This sample is rich enough to provide us with comprehensive information regarding the way Christmas spirit is creatively rendered.

Table 1. Winter and Christmas campaigns

| Christmas tree | Family | Santa Claus | Traditional food | Carols and traditions | Snow | Presents |
|----------------|--------|-------------|------------------|-----------------------|------|----------|
| 25% | 18% | 18% | 17% | 10% | 8% | 4% |

The table above emphasizes the relationship between local and global aspects in Romanian advertising showing the compelling way consumers might be appealed to at Christmas. Therefore, the Christmas tree, Santa Claus, gifts and snow at least on Christmas Eve do not reveal any specificity, even if these represent a percentage of 54.23 of the entire survey. This is the common representation for winter campaigns almost everywhere in the world, starting with the Coca-Cola popular culture. The analysis also reveals that family image (18%), gastronomy (Christmas cake and pork specialties 17%), Christmas carols and tradition (10%) bring to light the specificity of domestic ads.

Nevertheless, this is the best way to build an authentic relationship between consumers and brands, because everyone enjoys listening to national carols and tasting real local food, which, frequently, remind the buyers of their own childhood. Both global and domestic brands aim to pervade day-to-day consumers' life, thus enhancing their level of loyalty and trust, mostly at Christmas when buyers look forward to going shopping. Obviously, there is an association between global landmarks of Christmas and local traditions and customs, which encourage people to embrace the global way of living winter campaigns. Middle-aged people are more related to domestic traditions, while young people imported Santa Claus, the way Coca Cola advertised for many years. It is difficult to say who is going to win this battle, but nowadays, Romanian advertising maintains the balance.

2.1.3 Christmas ads

The main purpose of this section is to identify Christmas specificity according to the following aspects: Christmas symbols, traditional aspects developing in future campaigns and religious aspects dedicated to the same event. In the first case, answers support the title of our study very much. 482 of 700 respondents precisely expressed their ideas, 98 denied having any information about this topic, while 48 did not completely formulate the answers and 72 ignored the question specifically. Therefore, 120 surveys were not taken into discussion for different reasons. Compared to previous issues, commercial localization is a challenge here, while standardization is just a result of globalization, but less significant for this research. Thus, Romanian Christmas courses (pork meat, traditional Christmas cake, and wrapped mincemeat rolls) tops all the other results provided by survey (150), second come tradition (120), a topic which includes Christmas carols, cooking rituals, and celebrating in the countryside. Santa Claus did not miss this hierarchy with 70 votes (here we speak about many other global symbols such as reindeers, sledding, snow, bells), which comes closer to a local image of the Romanian family enjoying the Christmas dinner (68 surveys). The Christmas tree (36), presents (10) and the red colour or Coca-Cola (8 choices) belong to the global view of this Christian celebration. To conclude, most symbols identified at this point definitely (with 70% or 338 choices) reflect the specificity of local advertising and increase of consumer awareness.

As for future campaigns, respondents strongly recommended traditions (in 258 cases) which also appreciated the ritual of sacrificing the Christmas pig, New Year rituals and singing carols in public, and 66 interviewees regarded the family as the most important creative idea that should be emphasized by campaigns. 56 respondents stuck to traditional meals, whereas the Romanian village still tops 18 opinions, a fact quite understandable, since traditions survive better there. Without presenting all quantitative results this question provided, we think the balance between global and local aspects asserts the specificity of Romanian advertising, given that 412 respondents identified certain features of the Orthodox Christmas celebration, while 52 still appreciated the "Coca-Cola spirit."

Last but not least, the current research aims to discover the proportion in which religious aspects are highlighted in Romanian campaigns, considering that tradition is directly related to Orthodox consumers. First of all, 350 of 700 people declared that either they do not have any idea or there are not any religious clues in ads. Besides, 54 respondents answered vaguely and they were not considered in the discussion. From the rest of 296, the majority (110) identified the biblical scene of Jesus Christ's birth and 56 of them thought that carols and songs are relevant, while 54 noticed religious characters (such as the Virgin Mary, angels, the Holy Trinity, Saint Nicholas, the Magi). All other aspects (candles, the church, fasting, and symbol of the cross) are not explicitly related to Christmas time, but have more to do with the religious experience of respondents.

2.1.4 Christmas heroes

In terms of ad heroes, respondents were asked to identify the main characters from the family which are most often present during winter campaigns, and then to discover which personality features are more developed by ads. We do believe there is a strong connection between advertising communication and family structure. An important aspect is that 72 respondents negatively answered the first question and 68 of 700 would have invalidated the research because they did not provide us any information about the topic. Therefore, the analysis basically focused on 560 complete and correct results of our survey.

According to our results, the essential role is of the mother, given 206 surveys indicate her as a factor of credibility and constant hero in the family. Children represent the next level of the hierarchy in 160 cases, and then grandmothers with 82 votes, which lead us to an obvious conclusion: matriarchy is still the powerful pillar of local ads. The first male figure belongs to grandfather in 46 examples, closely followed by the father in 40 cases. Parents and grandparents regardless of gender were appreciated as main and persuasive characters in only 206 situations. Obviously, appealing to Romanian consumers by use of femininity has to do with many other features of local

advertising, which have already been provided by the survey, such as tradition, food, family image, and Christmas rituals. The second aspect of this sub-section reveals the way psychological features and personality of the main ad character may appeal to consumers. This issue reflects subjectivity, because it is always difficult to convey feelings, emotions or to describe someone's life-psychology. For these reasons, our results varied a lot and it was necessary to organize them in semantic categories, and to list similar answers in the same type. However, 12 surveys were neglected because of the respondents' vague understanding, and 142 answers cannot be included in the already discovered categories. 178 respondents did not have a positive answer to this question, and just replied "I don't know." However, generosity tops of 168 choices, followed by goodness and kindness with 106 respondents and afterwards by love in 34 situations. Sensitivity (20 votes), conservative and traditional behaviour (16 votes), patriotism and consumerism (12 choices for each of them) were not so well represented. The next step is to see the connection between the questions discussed. There is no doubt that mothers and grannies convey generosity, kindness and love, which are emphasized not only at Christmas, but under many other circumstances. These features remind everyone of Jesus' birth and femininity is more related to the upcoming religious event. Therefore, advertising highlights this biblical image of women taking care of their children to persuasively appeal to every domestic family.

3. Conclusion

According to the results presented, this paper does not completely reveal a correspondence between what viewers should see before and at Christmas time to be more captivated, in contrast to what the consumer really receives on the Romanian market. First, everyone appreciates the variety and credibility of tradition but without neglecting global values and symbols. Sometimes, respondents did not differentiate domestic and international aspects, which is the best sign of globalization. Therefore, globalization was definitely encouraged in advertising, because interviewees noticed two dimensions: the religious and traditional branch regardless of the ever-changing consumer insight and Christmas as a brand in itself, lending its market spirit to many other brands. Christmas is not only about Coca-Cola and Santa Claus, this celebration was meant to develop an entire culture which spread all over the world. Therefore, this survey revealed a fact that differentiates Romanian consumers from others: they recognize few religious features in winter campaigns and believe advertising should use them more, which means the need for localization is strongly expressed.

To conclude, this study demonstrates that global and local aspects are easily recognizable in Romanian advertising, and respondents' opinion on better appealing to domestic consumers suggests a continuing creative approach of highlighting traditional and religious aspects, which are still the best way to localize a brand.

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